
Information Item

California Postsecondary Education Commission

Standardized Testing

University of California (UC) President Richard C. Atkinson recently recommended two changes to the University's admissions policies: (1) that UC require only standardized tests that assess mastery of specific subject areas rather than undefined notions of "aptitude" or "intelligence"; and (2) that all UC campuses move away from admission processes that use narrowly defined quantitative formulas and adopt, instead, procedures that look comprehensively at applicants.

President Atkinson further recommended that UC no longer require applicants to take the SAT I. He has also indicated that the proposal to adopt procedures that are more holistic is intended to provide a fairer basis on which to make admission decisions, and that it would help ensure that standardized tests do not have an undue influence but rather are used to illuminate the student's total record.

Several individuals have been invited to address the Commission over a two-day period on the issue of standardized testing and implications for the admission of students. The discussion is intended to illuminate the issues involved as well as to provide an opportunity for the Commission to obtain a more thorough understanding of the issues involved and how to best address them. The invited guests are:

- ♦ Nicholas Lemann, author of *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (2000), has also written the award-winning *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991).
- ♦ Richard C. Atkinson, president of the University of California.
- ♦ Richard Ferguson, president of American College Testing, based in Iowa City, Iowa.
- ♦ Gaston Caperton, former governor of West Virginia, president and CEO of The College Board.

Note: Governor Caperton will speak Tuesday morning, with all others appearing Monday afternoon.

Presiding: Commission Chair Alan Arkatov.



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Introduction

Earlier this year, University of California President Richard C. Atkinson recommended to the Academic Senate of the University of California (UC) that it consider two major changes in the University's student admissions policies: (1) that the University require only standardized tests that assess mastery of specific subject areas rather than undefined notions of "aptitude" or "intelligence;" and (2) that all UC campuses move away from admission processes that use narrowly defined quantitative formulas and instead adopt procedures that look at applicants in a comprehensive, holistic way.

In advancing these proposals, President Atkinson further recommended that UC no longer require the SAT I for students applying to the University. Furthermore, in clarifying the second recommendation, President Atkinson indicated that the proposal to adopt procedures that are more holistic is intended to provide a fairer basis on which to make admission decisions. He said it would also help ensure that standardized tests do not have an undue influence but rather are used to illuminate the student's total record.

Background

For students, teachers and college admissions officers, standardized tests can be valuable tools to gauge academic progress and school accountability. How such tests are used, their value as well as their validity and reliability, is often an issue posed by critics of standardized tests. The notion of using such tests as either the sole criteria for college admissions or as being weighted substantially over such other criteria as high school grade point average, programmatic preparation, and several other important considerations also continues as an ongoing concern.

Several individuals (see the list below) have been invited to address the issue of standardized testing and implications for the admission of students. Over a two-day period, the Commission's discussion is intended to illuminate the issues involved as well as to provide an opportunity for the Commission to obtain a more thorough understanding of the issues involved and how they might best be addressed.

Presenters

These individuals have been invited to address the Commission:

- ◆ Nicholas Lemann is a staff writer with *The New Yorker* magazine. He is the former national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, a writer and editor at *The Washington Monthly*, *Texas Monthly*, and *The Washington Post*. He is the author of the award-winning *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991).

Mr. Lemann has also written *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (2000). In that book he presents his views on who invented standardized testing, their motivation, how the Educational Testing Service rose to dominance, what he believes went wrong, and why he believes that standardized testing has failed to make American society and education better. Born in New Orleans, Mr. Lemann graduated from Harvard College with a degree in American History and Literature

- ◆ UC President Richard C. Atkinson, the 17th president of the University, took office on October 1, 1995. He served previously as chancellor of UC San Diego; as director of the National Science Foundation, and was a long-term member of the faculty at Stanford University. President Atkinson is an internationally respected scholar and scientist. He began his academic career at Stanford University after serving in the U.S. Army. Except for a three-year period at UCLA, he was a member of the Stanford faculty from 1956 to 1980,. In addition to serving as professor of psychology at Stanford, he held appointments in the School of Engineering, School of Education, Applied Mathematics and Statistics Laboratories, and Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences.

Having done research that dealt with problems of memory and cognition, President Atkinson's theory of human memory has been influential in shaping research in the field. It has helped in clarifying the relationship between brain structures and psychological phenomena, in explaining the effects of drugs on memory, and in formulating techniques that optimize the learning process.

- ◆ Richard Ferguson is president of American College Testing which is based in Iowa City, Iowa. President of ACT, Inc. since 1988, he has provided leadership in defining and pursuing ACT's organizational goals and supervises ACT's senior managers.

Mr. Ferguson joined ACT in 1972 and has subsequently held a series of progressively responsible positions including: director of test development; vice president of research and development; senior vice president, programs; and executive vice president.

Throughout his career, Mr. Ferguson has written and spoken nationally on a broad cross-section of issues related to educational testing and measurement. As research associate at the University of Pittsburgh, he directed the National Science Foundation project on the issue of computers in providing individualized education to students. Prior to that, as lecturer in the Department Of Educational Research, he taught graduate-level courses in educational statistics and research design and advised doctoral students engaged in theses work.

- ◆ Gaston Caperton, former governor of West Virginia, is president and CEO of The College Board. He began his career in a small insurance

agency in Charleston, West Virginia before becoming its principal owner. That agency subsequently became the 10th largest privately owned insurance brokerage firm in the nation. Governor Caperton also owned a bank and mortgage banking company and was active in community projects.

In 1988, he was elected governor of West Virginia. When Governor Caperton took office, the state was on the brink of bankruptcy with more than \$500 million in debts, a declining economy, and a shrinking job base. He launched several reform initiatives that transformed the state. West Virginia now boasts a \$100 million surplus and a sound financial management approach, and was cited by Financial World magazine as the most improved state in the nation. As governor, he also undertook a major reorganization of West Virginia's higher education system, enacting legislation that required public institutions to create five-year strategic plans addressing such areas as access, student performance, and public awareness of educational programs. Governor Caperton executed the most aggressive K-12 school building program in the nation, raised teachers' salaries from 49th to 31st in the nation, and trained more than 19,000 educators through a statewide professional development initiative. He is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
